

# **Montana VR Council Meeting Minutes April 27-28, 2005**

# Vocational Rehabilitation Council

## April 27-28, 2005

### Billings, MT

**Members present:** Mike Hermanson, Barb Varnum, Carol Lambert (Wednesday), Chris Clasby, Don Jones, Denise Corrao, Ruth Straley, Claudette Vance, Ian Elliot, Ron Mills, Dick Trerise, David Boyd, Dennis Moore, Shaunda Albert (Thursday)

**Members absent:** Wayne Nankivel (excused), Jim Daily (excused)

**Staff and guests present:** JoAnn Null, Alan Davis, Chuck Leggate, Joe Mathews, Bob Jahner, Peggy Williams, Kelly

#### Wednesday, April 27

Ian called the meeting to order at 1:05, and members introduced themselves. The minutes were approved from the January meeting.

#### Announcements and Updates

Carol gave an update of SILC activities. The Legislature approved additional funding for IL, and also passed a bill changing the control of some transportation providers from the Public Service Commission to the Department of Transportation. In general the session went well—the independent living centers participated in a lot of activities and Ian played his bagpipes for the House of Representatives.

Chuck and Ian updated the Council on the Traumatic Brain Injury Advisory Council which met Monday. The grant may be reduced next year by the feds. People are now using the term “acquired brain injury” which can include stroke and Alzheimers.

Dick mentioned the Council of Exceptional Children conference was held recently, and about 800 people attended. It was a great conference, and they were entertained at lunch by performers from the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind, Expressions of Silence. Dick said the performance was phenomenal.

Peggy stated that Mike and Barb have both been hired by the VR Central Office, and will start in May.

#### VR Consumer Satisfaction, Dr. Alan Davis

Alan talked about the results from the consumer satisfaction survey. This is a mail survey, and we had a 34% response rate, which Alan says may not be consistent. The results are consistent with what we have seen over the years. Overall the level of satisfaction was high—82%. Areas that showed a high correlation with overall satisfaction included counselor understanding the consumers disability; having enough information to make good choices; consumer being involved in goal selection; relationship with counselor being helpful; having a successful outcome; remembering being told about the Client Assistance Program; and using the Client Assistance Program. Alan stated that there are two sides to the consumer satisfaction: (1) Rehab task—getting the job done; and (2) Responding to human dignity—counselor-consumer relationship. When asked how VR could improve, Alan suggested that training to support counseling techniques and relationships could be important. Normally training is on concrete topics—Ticket to Work, Social Security, etc,—but whenever he offers counseling training, his sessions are full. This appears to be something counselors really want. The Council also discussed how VR could use the results. We talked about having some type of action plan, and perhaps validating the results by conducting a phone survey (thereby getting a better response rate). This should be done with a random sample by trained interviewers. Another suggestion is to tell people while they are in the system that they will receive a survey. Another suggestion was to not make the survey anonymous, and then offer a random drawing prize for the people who respond. VR will present a plan on how the data will be used at the September Council meeting.

#### MVR Regional Report Chuck Leggate

Chuck Leggate, Billings regional administrator, talked about the makeup of his large district. They have 11 counselors and serve about 2,200 consumers per year. About 258 people become successfully employed. After many years with no turnover, this year Billings has 4 new counselors.

This has been a busy time for the Billings office—recently they participated in the Jobs Jamboree with 110 businesses. They also participated in a transitions (school to work) forum for parents of developmentally disabled students in the Billings area. They presented at a school to work fair this week, and set up a display at the TBI conference. In June there will be a Social Security exposition which will have benefits planners and Social Security staff. The conference will be aimed at 18 to 39 year old Social Security beneficiaries.

The Billings region has two offices—one in Billings and one in Miles City. The Miles City office may be moving to a more accessible building.

#### Public Awareness, Aging Horizons video

Ruth Straley arranged to have VR appear on the Aging Horizons show in February, and the Council watched the tape of that program. JoAnn Null and Beverly Berg were the VR stars, along with 2 consumers.

#### The big picture, Joe Mathews

Joe reported that the Legislature was very positive for people with disabilities. VR has fully matched its federal grant, and received a tuition "cost of living" increase. In addition, funding for Extended Employment and Independent Living which was previously being paid by the prevention and stabilization account, is now included in the general fund. Those items were in the Governor's budget. In addition, the Legislature gave VR more funding for Independent Living (\$100,000) per year, Extended Employment (\$210,000 per year), and funding for a new technology person for Blind and Low Vision (\$65,000 per year). Carol pointed out that there will be a special session next fall, and some of the additional funding in the budget bill likely will be reduced. She also pointed out that Rep. Penny Morgan (Billings) is a real advocate for all of the department of Public Health and Human Services.

Joe and Peggy just got back from a meeting of the VR directors in Washington, DC. The federal Rehab Act is still being reauthorized, and again there are two versions—the Senate and the House. One of the biggest differences is on how VR will contribute to funding the Workforce infrastructure. The Senate version caps the amount that VR can pay, while the House version does not. Another potential problem with the bill is the possibility of block granting VR funds. Sometimes this is referred to as "WIA Plus". VR advocates are very worried about this concept because it could dilute VR funding and people with disabilities would receive fewer services. Block grant effort is a concern because the people with disabilities will get lost in the cracks.

Another federal issue is the proposed closing of all the federal VR offices and decrease of federal staff. About half of the Rehabilitation Services Administration staff are slated to be let go. This downsizing effort will affect the federal governments ability to provide technical assistance to the states. Mike stated that the regional offices have helped bring many grants to the state, and he has found them very responsive when he had problems.

Joe mentioned that at one time VR was touting itself as an employment program---but VR is much more than an employment program, and that should not be lost.

**MOTION:** The Council should send a letter to the appropriate people supporting a letter Joe will write on the reauthorization bill and on closing the federal RSA offices. PASSED

Joe will send out a draft letter to the Council, and then the Council will write a letter to support it.

#### Chairmans Report, Peggy Williams for Jim Daily

Peggy reported on Jim's activities since he was not able to attend the meeting. Lena Belcourt has been hired to be the Governor's Disability Coordinator. This is a newly created position. A group composed of representatives from disability organizations across Montana has been meeting, and they are calling themselves Disability Action Alliance of Montana. Jim Daily is representing the Council, and Myrle Tompkins represents the Montana Association of the Blind. So far there have been 3 meetings and the group plans to start meeting quarterly. The next meeting, however, is in May. VR, the Statewide Independent Living Council, Montana Advocacy Program, Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities have been the primary sponsors of paying for the interpreters, meeting room, lunch, and facilitator.

The federal government will present a training session in August for VR Council representative from this region. This is the first time in over 20 years that regional training has been provided to Councils. Montana will send three people: Jim Daily, Peggy Williams, and Carol Lambert. Peggy and Jim are part of the regional workgroup setting up the conference.

#### TBI Conference, Ian Elliot

Ian reported on the Native American TBI conference. Montana ranks second in the country for the per capita incidence of brain injury (Wyoming is first). Registrations were over 30% higher than last year. Seven VR Council members attended. There were a number of nationally recognized speakers, and the performer, Jack Gladstone, was especially popular.

#### **Thursday, April 28**

##### Committee meetings and reports

See attachments

#### Field Services Bureau Report, Bob Jahner

Bob talked about the upcoming All Staff meeting. VR staff will learn about transitions (from Dick Trerise and other Office of Public Instruction staff); mental health issues; Native American culture; and new computer automation ideas.

#### Medicaid buy-in, Chris Clasby

Chris talked about the problems that people with disabilities have when they become employed and lose Medicaid benefits. VR's success depends on people getting jobs, not just getting training. Many employer-provided insurance plans do not cover all the services that Medicaid does, and sometimes people must satisfy a waiting period before they become eligible for insurance. In addition, sometimes people are afraid of losing Medicaid benefits when they go to work. There are some options—specifically 1619 A and B. A better option is the Medicaid buy-in which is a state-optional program that allows people who were on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and who received Medicaid to purchase Medicaid when they go to work. Unfortunately, this may cost the Medicaid program money. Chris would like Montana to re-look at this and hopefully decide to start a buy-in program in our state. Joe suggested that Chris talk to the Medicaid Advisory Council, and Peggy will find out the date of the next meeting.

**MOTION:** Chris be supported in attending the Medicaid Advisory Council and talking about this information and Chris will report back to the VR Council.

Motion passed.

#### Odds and Ends, Peggy Williams

Peggy went over the reports that were submitted to the federal government this past year. There is a lot of data available, and Peggy has even more data available if people have specific questions.

Peggy also went over the disability-related bills that passed the Legislature this year.

The state plan public hearing will be held on May 10 from 3:30 to 5:00 pm via MetNet (video conferencing) at 8 sites across Montana.

Not a lot of new things are happening with Ticket to Work. Chuck mentioned that the federal government will sponsor a forum in June in Billings to encourage ticket holders to use their tickets. However, the program has not been as successful as the federal government had hoped.

Because of the new governor, there is probably going to be a new method of making appointments to councils. The Governor's office wants to make the appointments directly rather than having the councils make nominations. Peggy will meet with the Governor's appointment secretary in early May to discuss how this will work. The VR Council has many openings: (1) a Native American, (2) a person who is deaf/hard of hearing, (3) a VR counselor (Barb got a different job), (4) an advocate (Mike got a different job), (5-8) three more advocates because of term limits (Chris, Ian, Jacob), and (9) another advocate (Myrle is not opting for a second term). Some of these will occur immediately and some after October 1. The VR Council is mandated by federal law, and certain positions are also mandated (advocates, Office of Public Instruction, Client Assistance Program, business, parent group). But the law does not get into the detail of having an advocate represent head injury, blindness, mental illness, etc. Peggy will report back to the Council on her meeting with the appointment secretary.

#### Other new business

Don mentioned that MAP (Montana Advocacy Program) recently challenged the statute that said a person who is on SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) could not get unemployment insurance. MAP won the case and the statute was invalidated.

Don also made a motion regarding the consumer satisfaction survey:

**MOTION:** VR present a proposal at the September meeting to do a telephone survey for consumer satisfaction in addition to what VR does now in order to see if the data is representative.

Discussion—VR should get a range of proposals; possibly do it through a college; if VR does it in-house, the validity might be compromised.

Motion passed

#### Next meeting dates:

September 7-8

November 14-15

#### Agenda items next time:

Invite Dr Wynnina, PHHS director

Gayle Shirley, PHHS public information officer

Disability navigator

Lena Belcourt, Governors Policy Advisory on Disability

Update from Chris on Medicaid

Proposal on consumer satisfaction survey

## **Attachment A**

### **Native American Committee**

### **April 2005**

#### **Goals:**

1. Encourage VR to provide cultural training for VR staff at All Staff in May 2005.  
*Ron Mocassin (suggested by David) will provide that training. In addition 11 VR staff attended the Native American Brain Injury conference.*
2. Encourage VR to send a representative to CANAR each year.  
*Dave Viall, Havre counselor, recently attended, and Joe Mathews will attend in May 2005.*
3. Encourage local VR relationships with Tribes.  
*Barb Varnum will be VR's new liaison with Section 120 Native American projects. Dick suggested a couple contacts in the Office of Public Instruction—Everall Fox and Mike Jetty.*
4. Recruit another Native American representative for the Council.  
*David suggested Ruby Clark, and Peggy will follow up after she finds out more information on the appointment process.*
5. Hold the September 2005 meeting on a reservation.  
*We decided to do the Native American Brain Injury conference instead this year, so this is something we can do next year.*
6. Encourage a statewide forum of Section 121 projects.  
*Barb will be working with Section 121 projects.*



## **Attachment B**

### **Public Awareness Committee**

### **April 2005 Minutes**

The overall theme or plan of the committee is to promote work and independence for Montanans living with disabilities. This will be accomplished through press releases, broadcast media, and direct distribution.

Thanks to all committee members and the VR agency, the committee met all 2004 goals.

- I. Legislative outcomes that put the focus on consumers and the VR agency:
  - Pocket Buddies
  - Stats at a Glance
  - 2004 Council Report to the Governor
  - Legislative Hearings
  - Ian playing the bagpipes for the House of Representatives in honor of the VR program
2. Aging Horizons TV segment aired in February. Another TV segment is being proposed for later in the year and will address transportation issues and concerns.
3. Per Peggy, the central office has updated "Friends of Rehab" list and have done 3 mailings.
4. Report to Congressional Delegation was prepared by Peggy.
5. Gayle Shirley from the Central Office will do press releases regarding addition of Mike Hermanson and Barb Varnum to staff.
6. Re-focus on brochures for distribution to Doctors' offices, Job Service, etc.
7. Thank you notes to be sent to sub-committee members of the Appropriations Committee.
8. Schedule time with Jay Scott from KBLL AM "Coffee Break" talk show.

## **Attachment C**

### **Transitions Committee**

### **April 2005 Minutes**

The Special Education federal legislation, IDEA, has recently been reauthorized, and there were significant changes which will impact transitions. There has been a philosophical change in identifying special education students—in the old model, eligibility was based on a discrepancy model—a difference between ability and performance. In other words, the student first had to fail at something. The new philosophy is that at the first sign a student is struggling, interventions are made, and different levels of intervention are tried. The implication to VR is that there may not be the traditional evaluation data available from the school. On a positive note, students coming out of high school will have a summary of performance and a functional performance on post-school goals and evaluative data.

It will be important to have VR brochures available to classroom teachers. The schools will need to do a good job in deciding whether to include outside agencies in IEP meetings (it is no longer mandated). In addition it will be important for VR and OPI (Office of Public Instruction) to work together to best serve the students.